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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7623
INFO RUEHBE/AMEMBASSY BELMOPAN IMMEDIATE 0007
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA IMMEDIATE 6845
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 3780
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 2652
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN IMMEDIATE 0214
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE 0816
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG 0695
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 1870
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA IMMEDIATE 0485
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 0712
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO IMMEDIATE 0061
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE IMMEDIATE 0085
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN IMMEDIATE 0279
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR IMMEDIATE 2058
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE 2719
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

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SUBJECT: USNS COMFORT VISIT TO ECUADOR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The USNS Comfort stopped in Manta, Ecuador, on August 15-21 during its humanitarian assistance deployment in the region. In coordination with Mission Ecuador personnel, NGOs and Ecuadorian authorities, members of the medical ship provided some 51,000 instances of medical, dental and veterinary services and training to local citizens and their communities, including physicians and medical students, hospitals and schools. Senior members of the Ecuadorian military and federal and local governments participated in a tour of the Comfort's operations, as well as the Manta Forward Operation Location. The visit received extensive local and national press attention and was portrayed as a positive, humanitarian contribution by the USG to the people of Ecuador. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On a 120-day humanitarian assistance deployment to Latin America and the Caribbean, the USNS Comfort stopped in Manta, Ecuador, on August 15-21. Members of the U.S. Navy, Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Public Health Service, Canadian forces, and the NGO Project Hope were assisted by multiple Embassy sections, and the U.S. Forward Operating Location in Manta. They coordinated with Ecuador's MFA, Joint Command, Navy, Air Force, the Manta Ministries of Health and Education and other local institutions to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Ecuador.

¶3. (SBU) Medical services included Project Hope's medical training for doctors, nurses and medical students at the Rodriguez Zambrano General Hospital, and were tailored specifically to the needs of the hospital, covering subjects ranging from high-risk pregnancy to HIV prevention and infectious disease control. Seabees from the Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit built one mobile and 13 concrete disability ramps, and provided construction services to a hospital and four schools. Medical supplies worth \$13,405 donated by Project Handclasp were delivered to the Rodriguez Zambrano Hospital. Preventative medicine physicians and technicians provided veterinarian services to farmers and animal owners in Arroyo, Ecuador, that included vaccinating livestock, vaccinating domestic animals against rabies, applying de-worming medications to cattle, and providing

education and training to prevent future infestations. An estimated 51,208 encounters, including medical and dental services, examinations, procedures, vaccinations and prescriptions, as well as training conducted by Project Hope volunteers, were provided to Ecuadorian citizens.

14. (U) Fourteen Navy musicians from the U.S. Navy Show Band livened up the visit by entertaining several hundred enthusiastic citizens of Manta with a musical performance at Manta's boardwalk on August 19. They held a Sunday concert in Montecristi, symbolically-charged birthplace of Eloy Alfaro, Ecuadorian ex-president and leader of the Ecuadorian Liberal Revolution, which will be the meeting site of the upcoming Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly. The Mayor and hundreds of town residents showed up for the event. The band also played for hundreds of people waiting to be treated at the medical treatment sites.

15. (SBU) The USNS Comfort visit drew participation from senior members of the Ecuadorian military as well as local and central governments, and contributed significantly to the Embassy's campaign to create a more favorable climate for possible renegotiation of the Manta FOL agreement, by reinforcing the positive humanitarian contribution the U.S. military can and does make in Ecuador. During the ship's Distinguished Visitor (DV) program, Colonel Eduardo Cardenas, Commander of the Ecuadorian Air Force 23rd Wing at the Eloy Alfaro Airbase in Manta, toured the Comfort and helped facilitate an impromptu visit to the Manta FOL by senior GOE officials, including MFA Undersecretary for Bilateral Affairs Diego Stacey, MOD General Under Secretary Miguel Angel, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs S. Ward Casscells, and Under Secretary of Health Ricardo Canizares. Local officials, such as Manabi Province Governor Vicente Veliz and Manta Mayor Jorge Zambrano Cedeno also participated. This distinguished delegation was escorted through the FOL by its Commander, LTCOL Robert Leonard -- the first such visit by any Correa administration official, followed by a lunch with Charge d'Affaires Jeff Brown, Military Group Commander Frank Wagdalt, and key FOL members at the FOL dining facility.

16. (U) Embassy pursued an aggressive press strategy to maximum the positive impact of the Comfort's visit, in line with our 18-month Manta FOL communications strategy. Press coverage of the visit was very positive and it received considerable national attention. National television coverage included 17 news reports on all national television channels for a total of 39 original on-air minutes, with follow-on reporting the mornings or afternoons following the original broadcasts. There were at least another six regional television spots, including an interview with Guayaquil Consul General Douglas Griffiths, which appeared on Manabi province's number one television station. In mostly factual reporting, the press dedicated considerable time to operations at the various treatment centers on the ground, but also included human interest spots on the "first-patient" story, the ship visit by Miss Ecuador with a group of patients with skin diseases, and a note about a Guayaquil-native Comfort ship member who helped operate on his cousin. Articles in all national newspapers and major radio stations followed similar themes.

17. (SBU) Project Hope, which participated in the Comfort visit, was very pleased with the results of the work it did in Manta. Bill Fox, Project Hope's Chief Operation Officer, is now planning a trip to Ecuador in September to continue its work and to discuss developing a joint project, perhaps in the form of a private-public partnership between Project Hope, Hutchinson, and the Beneficiary Council in Guayaquil to offer community health training in Manta. This could become another opportunity for USG assistance and community outreach involvement.

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